

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 00918 221531Z  
ACTION ARA-14

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DEPARTMENT PASS ALL ARA DIPLOMATIC POSTS

EO 11652 N/A  
TAGS: ELAB, HO  
SUBJECT: OSCAR GALE: HONDURAS MOURNS OUTSTANDING LABOR LEADER

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 0849

1. OSCAR GALE, ONE OF THE PRIME ARCHITECTS OF THE EPIC AND HISTORIC 1954 BANANA WORKERS STRIKE IN HONDURAS THAT LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE COUNTRY'S TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND A LABOR LEADER KNOWN AND RESPECTED THROUGHOUT THE HEMISPHERE, WAS BURIED IN SAN PEDRO SULA, HONDURAS ON FEBRUARY 17. FOR MANY YEARS THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY'S

MOST IMPORTANT UNION, THE 11,000 MEMBER UNITED BRANDS WORKERS UNION (SITRATERCO), GALE HAD BEEN RETIRED FROM UNION MATTERS FOR SEVERAL YEARS BECAUSE OF A STROKE SUFFERED IN 1973. NEVERTHELESS, HE WAS APPOINTED BY CHIEF OF STATE, GENERAL JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR, TO SERVE AS A PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE ON THE ADVISORY COUNCIL, A QUASI-LEGISLATIVE ORGANIZATION THAT PREPARED HONDURAS' RECENTLY APPROVED ELECTORAL LAW. GALE WAS RETURNING TO SAN PEDRO SULA FROM A MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL WHEN HE MET WITH HIS FATAL AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT. LOCAL LAW AND CUSTOM (BASED ON INADEQUATE PRESERVATION FACILITIES) REQUIRED PROMPT INTERMENT, THUS RULING OUT ATTENDANCE AT FUNERAL OF HEMISPHERIC LABOR LEADERS.

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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 00918 221531Z

2. HE WAS KNOWN AND RESPECTED AS AN HONEST, COURAGEOUS AND DEDICATED LABOR LEADER THROUGHOUT THE HEMISPHERE. IN HONDURAS HIS FRIENDS RANGED FROM THE CHIEF OF STATE THROUGH ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY TO THE HUMBLEST OF WORKERS--AS WAS GALE IN HIS ORIGINS--AND HIS LOSS IS THAT OF A PERSON NOT ONLY RESPECTED BUT LITERALLY LOVED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

3. RADIO STATIONS, NEWSPAPERS AND PUBLIC FIGURES JOINED IN AN OUTPOURING OF GENUINE EULOGY, ESPECIALLY REMARKABLE BECAUSE OF GALE'S SEMI-RETIREMENT FROM PUBLIC LIFE. CELEO GONZALEZ, ALONG SIDE WHOM GALE FOUGHT SO MANY BATTLES, SAID SIMPLY "I HAVE LOST MORE THAN A FRIEND, I HAVE LOST MY BROTHER." EVEN GENERALLY CONSERVATIVE, "PRENSA" HEADLINED THE "TRAGIC DEATH OF THE PIONEER IN THE HONDURAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT" AND DEVOTED THREE FULL PAGES TO THE FUNERAL, AS DID OTHER HONDURAN NEWSPAPERS.

4. CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR SENT CONDOLENCES AND A PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE, BEING UNABLE TO ATTEND HIMSELF. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, GALE HAD JUST GIVEN TO MELGAR THE ROCKING CHAIR THAT JOHN F KENNEDY HAD GIVEN GALE.

5. COMMENT: GALE'S DEATH WILL BE SEEN BY MANY AS ENDING A UNIQUE PERIOD IN HONDURAN HISTORY. WHILE CELEO GONZALEZ AND OTHER LEADERS SO IMPORTANT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HONDURAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT ARE STILL ACTIVE, GALE OCCUPIED A SPECIAL PLACE IN THE AFFECTION OF ALL WHO KNEW AND WORKED WITH HIM. HE WAS SET APART BY HIS TOTAL HONESTY, BASIC SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND DEDICATION TO THE BETTERMENT OF HONDURAN WORKERS AND CAMPESINOS AND THE PROGRESS OF HONDURAS AS A WHOLE.  
KNIGHT

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 00918 221531Z

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## Message Attributes

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